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AUTHOR Pillar, Arlene M.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine if the responses of elementary school children to questions about the moral dilemmas in fables would reflect developmental trends in moral judgment, along the lines suggested by Jean Piaget. Sixty second, fourth, and sixth grade children listened to three tape-recorded fables and responded orally to questions related to the four dimensions of morality delineated by L. Kohlberg: (1) intentionality, (2) relativism, (3) punishment, and (4) independence of sanctions. Individual interviews were taped and the responses analyzed according to the theoretical framework described by Piaget. The results showed that the children's responses to the fables reflected the model of moral domain described by Piaget. The data also showed developmental trends for each of the four moral dimensions. The findings suggest that fables can be used to elicit children's judgments about responsibility and blame, the extent and nature of obligations to others, and ways to handle wrongdoing. Questions used in the study are appended. (FL)

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Arlene M. Pillar, Ph.D.
67 Forester Street
Long Beach, New York 11561
(516) 431-8192

Associate Professor
Department of Reading
C. W. Post Center, Long Island University
Greenvale, New York 11548
(516) 299-2244, 5, 6

Dimensions of the Development of Moral Judgment as Reflected in Children's Responses to Fables

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Dimensions of the Development of Moral Judgment as Reflected in Children's Responses to Fables

This paper presents the pertinent findings from a study of the responses of 60 elementary school students to three fables. The first part summarizes the theoretical framework of the original study including a definition of terms. The second part addresses the purpose and rationale, the design, and the data analysis. The third part discusses the findings and implications in light of current instructional practices and developmental theory.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is divided into two major sections, Moral Development and Response to Literature.

Jean Piaget's groundbreaking research reported in The Moral Judgment of the Child (1932/1965) supports the belief that moral judgment develops through a series of cognitive reorganizations called stages. He views all children as moving through these qualitatively different patterns of thought.

By questioning children about rules for games of marbles, Piaget identified two braod aspects of moral development that follow upon one another as children mature. Although he is guarded about the construal of the term stages, immature morality yields to mature morality as children are freed

from the constraints placed upon them by adults and as they increasingly interact with their peers. Stages are not neatly defined levels which are mutually exclusive, yet, sufficient distinction exists for important pronouncements about development.

The present study explored reader response to fables within the moral dimensions of intentionality, relativism, punishment, and independence of sanctions, initially described by Piaget and subsequently studied by Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg's (1964) investigations support Piaget's findings that the child's earliest morality is oriented toward obedience, punishment, and impersonal forces, where judgment is based on immediate, external, and physical circumstances (p. 399). This morality progresses toward more subjective and internal norms and values. At the immature level, there is a concern for consequences rather than intentions, a lack of awareness of relativity of value, and a definition of right as obedience to authority. Like Piaget, Kohlberg has found developmental increases in the use of reciprocity as a basis for judgment, in the notions of relativism of value, and in the denial of the moral superiority of authorities. This investigation considered children's responses in these terms.

Using Piagetian insights about children's morality and the prevailing ethics in fairy tales, F. Andre Favat (1977) found striking correspondences between the two. The young child's desire for harsh, expiatory justice conjoins the dire justice meted out in fairy tales. Favat's work shows that traditional

literature encapsules human concerns and, at a particular point, corresponds to children's emerging stage of moral reasoning. Young children turn to fairy tales with great interest because they reaffirm their simplistic conception of the world. In light of Favat's theoretical analysis, a question emerged about children's responses to the dilemmas in another form of traditional literature, fables.

Another issue for this study was the consistency of children's responses. There exists a lengthy history of research based on the assumption that there are no universal, nonarbitrary moral principles, and that individuals acquire their own values from the external culture (Bandura & McDonald, 1963; Mischel & Mischel, 1976). The debate between social learning theorists and cognitive developmentalists is a thriving one. Kohlberg (1971), however, posits that "There is a universal set of moral principles held by men in various cultures" (p. 178). His findings are not compatible with cultural relativism because moral stages represent major consistencies of moral evaluation within individuals.

Kohlberg's research suggests that the different facets of children's moral thinking form reasonably consistent patterns. He would allow that conduct is situation specific, but that verbal moral judgment is quite consistent. Acquisition of higher moral stages does not result from direct learning of content taught by cultural agents. Rather, it is a restructuring of early immature types of thinking. For this study, there was a need to know about consistency and whether or not

children were able to apply the same reasoning structures in their responses when the content of the fable changed. Therefore, a question about the consistency of children's responses to moral dilemmas of varying content was addressed.

Studies of reader response are characterized by marked differences in purpose, design, and methodology. Research in recent years, however, focuses on naturalistic description of developmental levels of response illustrative of children's thinking at select ages (Cooper, 1976; Petrosky, 1977).

Arthur Applebee (1978) examined children's responses to stories and found that these reflected the general trends in development described by Piaget. In The Child's Concept of Story, Applebee classifies the responses of children ages 3 through 17 according to increasingly complex levels of thinking. He states that the interaction of a particular reader with a particular work "inevitably differs from reader to reader and also changes over time as a given reader's construct system develops and matures" (p. 132). Although general claims hold across the developmental range, Applebee demonstrates that "there are also clear and striking changes in the nature of literary response at different ages" (p. 132). Readers bring a panoply of experiences to bear upon their ever-spiraling understanding of literature and life.

Research in reader response that emphasizes the importance of the interaction of the reader and the text, the Transactional Model, is based upon Louise Rosenblatt's classic work Literature As Exploration (1938/1968), and more recently The Reader, The

Text, The Poem (1978). In this model, what the student brings to the reading is just as important as the literary work itself. In Rosenblatt's (1938/1968) terms, "the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings" (p. 25). Each reading, then, is a unique re-creation of the text. The literary experience, even at the elementary level, causes readers to call upon their predilections to evoke meaning from a text.

Wolfgang Iser (1974) sees experiencing literature as a "kaleidoscope of perspectives, preintentions, recollections" (p. 279), and describes readers as filling in gaps in the text as they read. Iser's view accounts for the existence of wide ranges of response. One text holds potential for different realizations, and no reading can exhaust the full potential, because readers fill in gaps in their own ways. For Iser, as for Rosenblatt, there is no one correct reading--only personal meanings that result from individual gap-filling.

Since readers respond in terms of their own experiential background, responses reveal a great deal about readers--their concerns, needs, and in the case of this study, their moral reasoning. Moral judgment theory shows that characteristic structures exist in the moral reasoning of children at different stages of development. These structures can be applied to and used to describe responses to literature. Even though each reader's response is unique, at the same time, the responses are circumscribed by developmental parameters.

Responses can be clustered, then, insofar as they reflect levels of moral reasoning. A final research question explored was the nature of responses for each fable at different developmental levels.

Definition of Key Terms

Moral judgment "has been primarily studied as the child's use and interpretation of rules in conflict situations, and his reasons for moral action, rather than as correct knowledge of rules or conventional belief in them" (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 394). Four dimensions of moral judgment, as defined by Kohlberg, were investigated in the present study:

Intentionality. "Young children tend to judge an act as bad mainly in terms of its actual physical consequences, whereas older children judge an act as bad in terms of the intent to do harm" (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 396).

Relativism. "The young child views an act as either totally right or totally wrong, and thinks everyone views it in the same way. If the young child does recognize a conflict in views, he believes the adult's view is always the right one. In contrast, the older child is aware of possible diversity in views of right and wrong" (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 397).

Punishment. "Young children advocate severe painful punishment after stories of misdeeds; older children increasingly favor milder punishments leading to restitution to the victim and to the reform of the culprit" (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 398).

Independence of sanctions. "The young child says an act is bad because it will elicit punishment; the older

child says an act is bad because it violates a rule, does harm to others" (Kohlberg, 1964, p. 397).

Immature responses reflect children's earliest morality and are oriented to obedience, punishment, and impersonal forces, characterized by the idea that adult-made rules are final. Duty is obeying authorities and justice, whatever the authority commands, does not have to be related to the misdeed (Flavell, 1963, pp. 290-297). The letter of the law is followed with overt consequences alone counting in assessing the wrongfulness of acts.

Mixed responses reflect a transition from immature to mature thinking. Responses indicate an increasing rejection of literalism in favor of an awareness of abstractions. Justice is seen as restitutive and viewed as equitable distribution of sanctions and rewards meaningfully related to the acts which engendered them (Flavell, 1963, pp. 290-297). In many cases, children are unable to justify the statements they make.

Mature responses reflect morality oriented to justice and responsibility. Judgments are in terms of subjective or internal purposes and values formed out of reciprocal realtionships among status peers and based upon mutual respect. Control is established by mutual agreemant and rules can be modified (Jantz, 1976, p. 301). Making the transgressor feel that the bond of solidarity has been broken is a better preventive of relapses in behavior than punishment. These responses consider the spirit of the law and respect

divergent opinions. Responsibility for wrongdoing is viewed in terms of motives and intentions.

Purpose and Rationale

Within the preceding theoretical framework, this research addressed three major questions:

1. Among second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade children, will responses to questions about the moral dilemmas in fables reflect developmental trends in moral judgment? In particular, will fewer young children give mature responses than older children with regard to the following four dimensions:

   a. intentionality;

   b. relativism;

   c. punishment; and

   d. independence of sanctions?

2. Are children consistent in their level of response across varying content?

3. What is the nature of immature, mixed, and mature responses to each fable?

In recent years, there has been an increasing concern in our society with helping students develop their moral judgment and a concomitant concern for educational programs to achieve this (Dullea, 1975; Etzioni, 1976; Fiske, 1975; Gallup, 1975, 1976, 1980; Nyquist, 1976). Piaget's pioneering work on the development of moral judgment is invaluable for describing stages although, unfortunately, it has yet to have practical application in educational programs.

Many propose that literature can be used to develop moral judgment (Biskin & Hoskisson, 1974; Broderick, 1971; Gosa, 1977; Jantz, 1976; Klingberg & Agren, 1971; Rosenzweig & Harris, 1977; Sebesta & Iverson, 1975; Shackford, 1978) since readers can be influenced emotionally, attitudinally and intellectually by what they read (Purves & Beach, 1972; Swinger, 1975). It has been suggested that experiencing a work of literature calls into being the moral imagination (Miller, 1968). Traditionally, fables are cited as an appropriate type of literature for moral education because of the ethical problems they present. They are tales whose intent is to point up the ethical implications of human action and have been used for centuries in many cultures for the moral instruction of adults. In this investigation, however, fables were found to appear frequently in basal reading series written for the elementary school child. An examination of 33 reading series showed that 118 fables appeared in 62 books. Despite assumptions about the positive value of fables for helping children focus on moral dilemmas, there was no evidence of the ways in which elementary school children responded to them.

Although research in children's literature is developing at a steady pace (Monson & Peltola, 1976), response to literature research at the elementary level is sparse. The terrain is generally uncharted. In his introduction to Elements of Writing About a Literary Work, Squire (1966) says, "Despite occasional brilliant studies, researchers thus far have only a limited understanding of the complex dimensions of reader response" (p. v).

To date, most of the studies involving literature concern reading interests and the teaching of literature. The limited research in the area of response has focused mainly on short stories and poetry in the written protocols of students at the junior high school level and above. It appears that we need to develop studies at the elementary level for they may reveal data not found among mature readers with well established personal patterns of response. Further, only recently has an attempt been made to study response developmentally (Applebee, 1973, 1978; Bettelheim, 1976; Favat, 1971, 1977; Gardner & Gardner, 1971; Purves, Note 1) with no research specifically focusing on the dimensions of moral judgment as reflected in response to fables.

The purpose of this study, therefore was to examine elementary school students' oral responses to fables for the selected moral aspects described by Kohlberg, as aforementioned, to see if they reflected developmental trends. Another purpose was to determine the extent and nature of consistency in levels of response for varying content to see whether or not the content of the fable had any effect on the level of moral reasoning structures children used when they responded. Furthermore, the nature of immature, mixed, and mature responses to each fable was examined.

Design of the Study

The descriptive design of this study was structured to elicit oral responses to "The Shephard Boy and the Wolf," "The Fox and the Goat," and "The Lion and the Mouse" from a stratified

random sample of elementary school children. The participants were 60 second-, fourth-, and sixth-grade children attending two suburban schools on Long Island, New York. Although, in the past, sex has not been shown to be a determinant of response (Burgdorf, 1966; Cooper, 1969; Haug, 1972; Skelton, 1963; Squire, 1964; White, 1973), for purposes of control, there was an equal number of boys and girls at each grade. They listened to three tape-recorded fables and responded to questions related to the four dimensions of morality. Individual interviews were taped and responses analyzed according to the theoretical framework described by Piaget. Interrater reliability was established for scoring the protocols.

The selection of the fables was guided by research in language structure, frequency of occurrence in reading series, clarity and strength of dilemma, and ranking by a panel of judges. Stimulus questions were constructed to elicit response in relation to the four dimensions of moral judgment. Results of a pilot study informed the formulation of these probes. The stimulus questions were validated by two experts who have published widely in the psychology of moral development and elementary education. (See Appendix A for a complete list of the stimulus questions)

Data Analysis

For Research Question 1, in order to determine children's level of moral judgment for each of the four dimensions, the investigator scored responses according to the descriptions

presented in the theoretical framework. Responses were scored immature, mixed, or mature from the structures children used in their reasons for preferring one action over another. This procedure was used for all four dimensions across each of the three fables.

Responses were subjected to analysis using Kendall's tau. Four analyses, one for each moral dimension, were done for the relation between grade and level of moral judgment. (See Tables 1-4) These data, expressed in frequency and per cent, for the dimensions of intentionality, relativism, punishment, and independence of sanctions, show a clear developmental pattern across grade levels.

The relations between age and maturity of response for each dimension given in rank order are: punishment, tau = .71, $p < .001$; independence of sanctions, tau = .42, $p < .01$; intentionality, tau = .40, $p < .01$; and relativism, tau = .30, $p < .01$. Although the relation is significant for all the dimensions, a comparison of tau reveals that it is most significant for punishment. This may be explained by the fact that for young children the fear of punishment is a concrete one which plays an important role in their interactions with adults. Punishment is invoked very early by parents and teachers to shape behavior and mold attitudes. It carries a great deal of meaning for children due to the emotion-laden circumstances in which it is embedded. Older children recognize the role of reciprocity in social realtions and

Table 1

Responses by Grade and Level of Moral Development for Intentionality Across Three Fables

	Level of Moral Development						
	Immature		Mixed		Mature		
Grade	f	%	f	%	f	%	Total
2	15	25	33	55	12	20	60
4	5	8	33	55	22	37	60
6	1	1	22	37	37	62	60

N = 20 children at each grade responding to three fables, to equal 60 responses.

tau = .40, p < .01

Table 2

Responses by Grade and Level of Moral Development for Relativism Across Three Fables

	Level of Moral Development						
	Immature		Mixed		Mature		
Grade	f	%	f	%	f	%	Total
2	34	57	19	32	7	12	60
4	20	33	23	38	17	28	60
6	11	18	26	43	23	38	60

N = 20 children at each grade responding to 3 fables, to equal 60 responses.

tau = .30, p < .01

Table 3

Responses by Grade and Level of Moral Development for Punishment Across Three Fables

	Level of Moral Development						
	Immature		Mixed		Mature		
Grade	f	%	f	%	f	%	Total
2	36	60	20	33	4	7	60
4	16	27	33	55	11	18	60
6	2	3	28	47	30	50	60

N = 20 children at each grade responding to three fables, to equal 60 responses.

tau = .71, p < .001

Table 4

Responses by Grade and Level of Moral Development for Independence of Sanctions Across Three Fables

	Level of Development						
	Immature		Mixed		Mature		
Grade	f	%	f	%	f	%	Total
2	32	53	16	27	12	20	60
4	26	43	20	33	14	23	60
6	9	15	27	45	24	40	60

N = 20 children at each grade responding to three fables, to equal 60 responses.

tau = .42, p < .01

the diminishing importance of punishment as a deterrent to misdeeds. The responses of both groups of children are structured by their thinking and reflect their attitudes about punishment.

More abstract notions such as independence of sanctions, intentionality, and relativism, are alien to a greater extent than punishment in young children's thinking. These elusive concepts come to be more meaningful within the stage of formal operations, as peer interactions assume greater importance in the child's life. Punishment as a deterrent to misbehavior diminishes as the child matures and the need for maintaining a bond of solidarity with peers increases.

The percentages of children who gave mature responses for all dimensions are as follows: Intentionality--younger 20%, older 62%; relativism--younger 12%, older 38%; punishment--younger 7%, older 50%; and independence of sanctions--younger 20%, older 40%. In each dimension, more older students gave mature responses than younger. Further, greater percentages of younger students gave responses at the immature level of moral judgment as compared with older students.

In order to answer Research Question 2, consistency scores were determined for each participant through a process of triangulation upon response. To examine the pattern of consistency, a histogram was constructed. (See Figure 1) Looking across the grades, we see that more second-grade children, 12 (60%), had high consistency scores than fourth-, 8 (40%), or sixth-grade children, 7 (35%) in accordance with an <u>a priori</u> criterion measure. Thus, there is a clear develop-

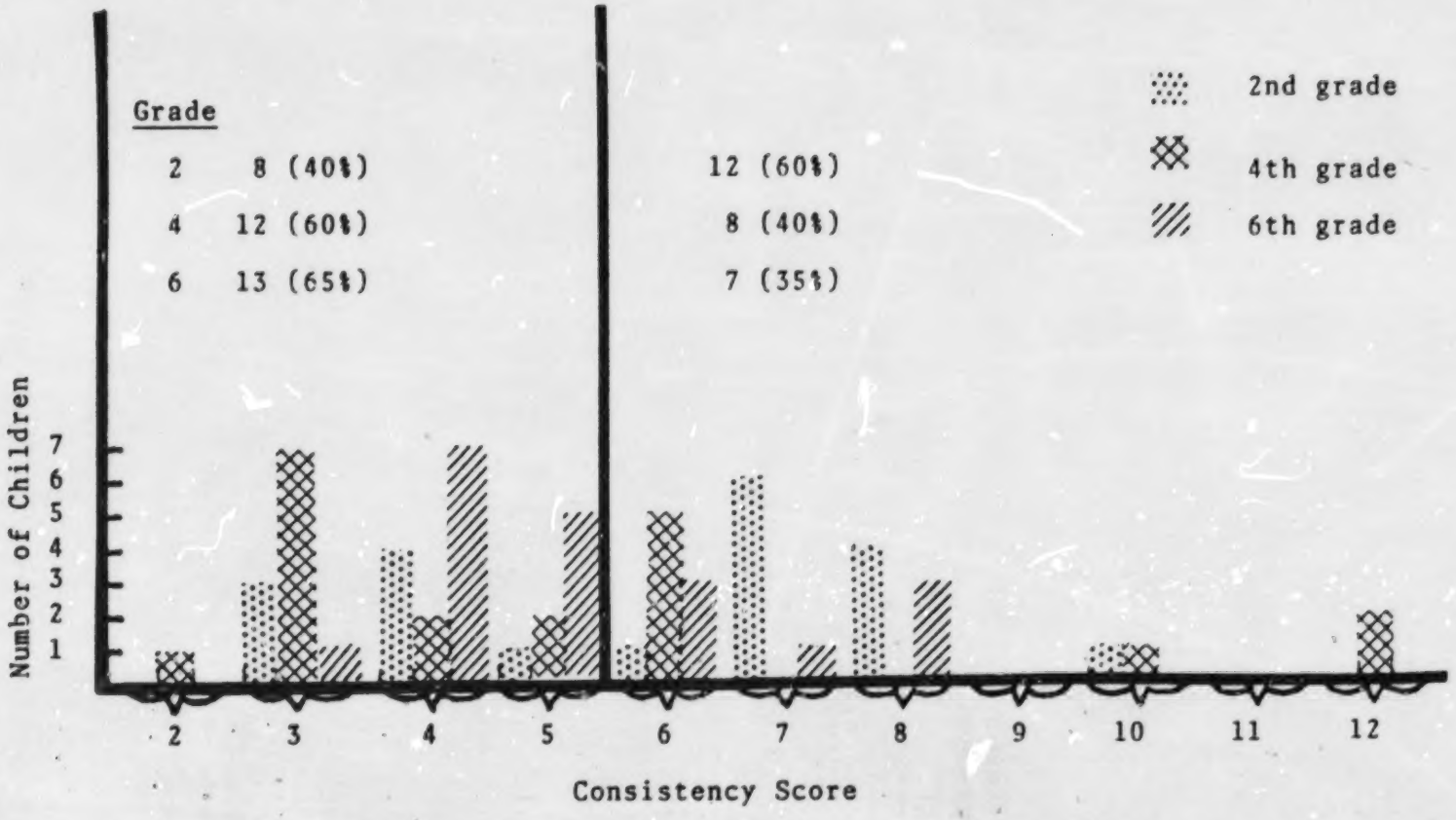

Figure 1. Histogram of ipsative consistency scores across three fables and four dimensions for grades 2, 4, and 6.

mental trend; from grades 2 to 6, the number of children who had low consistency increased while the number who had high consistency decreased.

That all children were consistent to some extent in their level of response across differing content is important to note. Although it seems that children are less often high consistent as they mature, that is, they are more flexible in their thinking, the small numbers of children involved and the small differences between the groups make global statements about the developmental nature of consistency difficult at this time.

Consistency scores were also used to graph the relation between content and level of moral judgment to answer the second research question. The effect of content may be seen in Figure 2 comparing grades. Overall, across the grades from 2 to 6, regardless of content, the number of responses at the mature level increases and the number of responses at the immature level decreases. The patterns in level of response for lying ("The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf"), tricking ("The Fox and the Goat"), and helping ("The Lion and the Mouse") are similar across grades with one anomaly for lying which occurred at the sixth grade.

Regarding the lying dilemma, responses at the immature level decrease from grades 2 to 6, while responses at both the mixed and mature levels increase. The irregularity in the pattern, however, is that there are fewer mature responses than mixed for sixth grade. One might have expected more

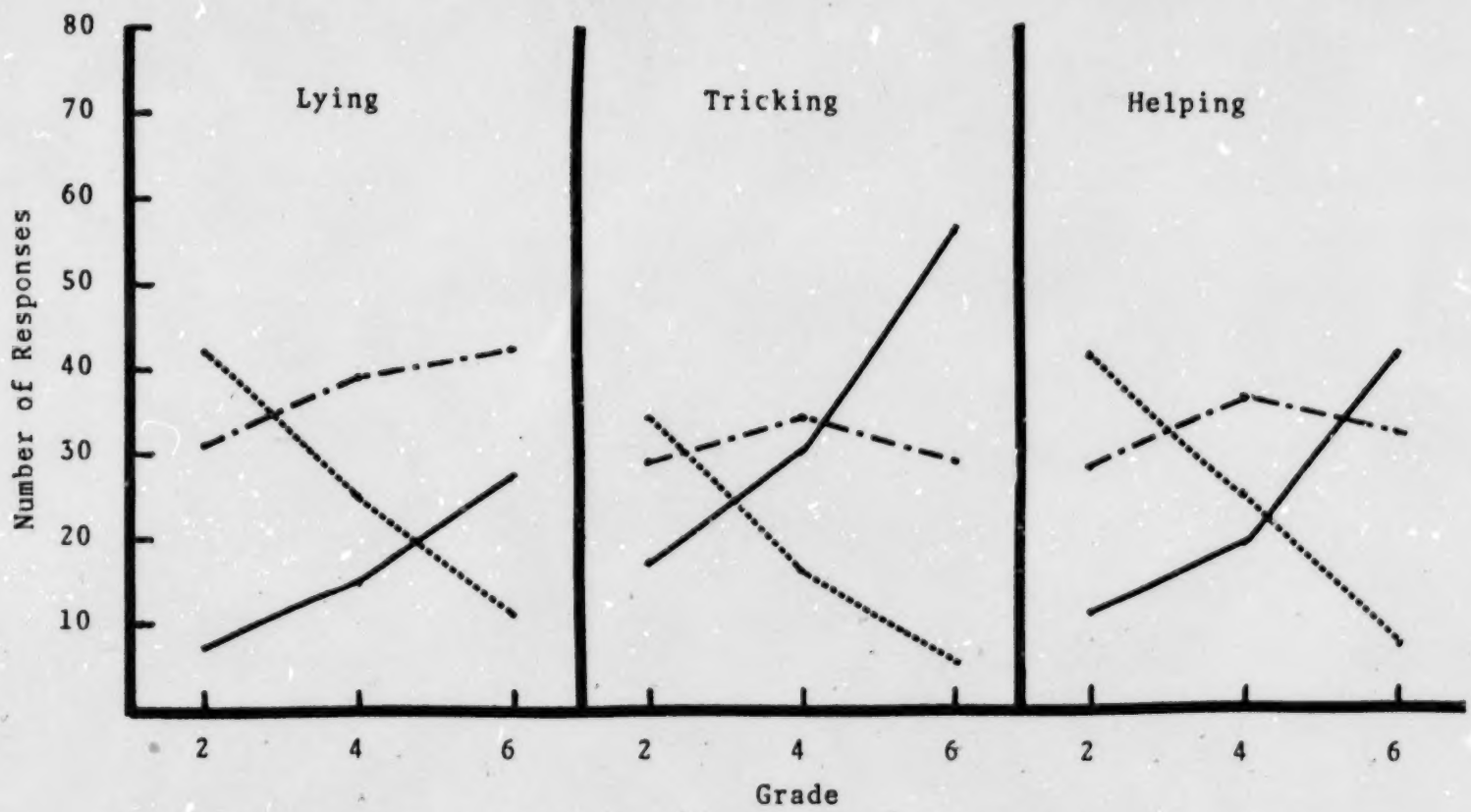

Figure 2. Level of response across grades for content.

Immature

Mixed

Mature

N = 80 responses, 20 children at each grade for four dimensions

responses at the mature level for this group but, perhaps, responses were bound at the mixed level because of the very serious consequences of the shepherd boy's lying and the implications breaking mutual trust had for children at this grade.

For both tricking and helping the patterns in level of response are comparable. There were more responses at the immature level for grade 2 than at the mixed and mature levels. Similarly, at grade 6 there were more mature responses than mixed and immature. The number of mixed responses at grades 2 and 6 for both tricking and helping fell between the number of mature and immature responses. The irregularity in the pattern is at grade 4 where for tricking there were more responses at the mature level than at the immature, and for helping there were more responses at the immature level than at the mature. This variation shows the effect of content. Overall, there were more mixed responses for fourth grade than mature or immature responses.

Within the developmental patterns in Figure 2, variations occur in level of response as a result of content. Despite the similarity of the contexts in which the dilemmas were presented (all fables), some situation specific responses emerged. It is possible that the concise nature of the fables, with their sparse descriptions and symbolic characters, were not the best context for testing consistency across content. It may be difficult for children to understand the thoughts, intentions, and emotions of others as couched in

the simple literary terms of fables. Children might have been consistent to a greater or lesser extent in level of response had the consequences of the fables been either all positive, all negative, or all benign. In addition to developmental factors and dimensions, it was found that content affected children's responses to moral dilemmas.

Research Question 3 addressed the nature of immature, mixed, and mature responses. A qualitative analysis determined clusters of responses within the three levels of moral development for each dimension across the fables. Typical and recurrent responses at different stages of moral reasoning substantiated Piaget's developmental theory.

Responses were categorized as immature if they considered adult-made rules as final and inviolable, if the letter of the law was followed with justice meted out by whatever the authority commands, and if the wrongfulness of acts was assessed in terms of overt consequences.

When asked why the shepherd boy should not lie, for example, responses from children at the immature level of moral development reflected the idea that such behavior could result in punishment. Furthermore, one could get in trouble or even lose friends. For students with this constraint orientation, rules define what is forbidden and punishable, and the powerful people who do the forbidding and punishing are the source of rules, the source of justice. As Piaget (1932/1965) says, the reason "most universally invoked...is that you mustn't tell lies because 'you get punished'" (p. 167).

The following are typical responses to the question "Why shouldn't he lie?" from "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" interview:

> Cause when you do you get in trouble.
>
> He could get in big trouble and lying isn't very good. That's very bad.
>
> He could lose a friend. It isn't nice. The wolf killed all the sheep and it isn't nice to kill them.
>
> It's not nice to lie 'cause then you'll know you get punished and then you'll learn your lesson. Then nobody will be your friend. 'Cause somebody once lied and nobody was their friend.
>
> He should tell the truth. Someday he could get in trouble for lying. You can get more punished for it for lying.

In "The Fox and the Goat" interview, the structure for immature responses for justice, that is, why the fox should not have tricked the goat, is similar. Students stressed the consequences of not following a rule and cited getting into trouble and losing friends, once again. Some responses to the question "Why shouldn't people fool each other?" were:

> It could lead to big trouble like starting a fight. Nasty tricks going on.
>
> You'd lose friends. It isn't right to fool people. If you're in trouble, if you trick them, they won't help you out.
>
> They could get in trouble some day. Punished like taken to the principal. It could lead into a big mess.
>
> It's not nice to trick. Someone might think it's the other person and the person that did trick him will get into trouble.

These responses show how young children's responses reflected their fear of punishment, their respect for adult authority,

and the importance of consequences in making judgments.

By contrast, the reasoning underlying mature responses valued mutual respect and reciprocity in human relations. Piaget (1932/1965) says that mature reasons invoked against lying emphasize "that truthfulness is necessary because deceiving others destroys mutual trust" (p. 170). A recognition of others' rights and feelings were markers of mature responses in this study.

The reason for not lying was no longer fear of punishment but, rather, respect for the importance of life. Some typical responses were:

> If you lie, no one can trust you when they do find out you were lying. You should be able to trust each other.
>
> If you lie about something that's really big, you might hurt somebody.
>
> Why should you lie? You can hurt people, yourself. Do damage to property.
>
> You could get people hurt and that's what causes you to die in a way. If he hadn't cried, "Wolf!" the first two times, then the people would have come. Lying causes unhappiness and you can hurt and upset people sometimes.

The students giving these responses understood that acts harming others are wrong.

When asked why people should not trick each other as in "The Fox and the Goat" responses at the mature level of moral development reflected the unacceptability of a breach of mutual trust. Typical responses were:

> Then people wouldn't trust each other and they'd start fighting. That's what starts most wars. People can't trust each other so they start fighting.

> People shouldn't fool each other because a lot of people might get hurt. It isn't right. You could be using them.
>
> It's not right. The same thing as lying. People get hurt in the end.
>
> Nobody will count on you. Something could have happened and they both could have died because they both could have drowned.

These more mature responses for lying and tricking showed a flexibility in thinking that considered alternative points of view.

Some responses reflected structures no longer immature, yet not quite mature. These were categorized as mixed. Although adult authority still had a tenacious hold on thinking, these responses characterize a period of transition constituted by growing concerns for mutual respect and reciprocity. In general, mixed responses showed that students ceased to accept adult commands without question, although they were unable to explain why they felt as they did.

Moral attitudes evident in the qualitative analysis of response indicated that before children could consider the intentions engendering an act, they made judgments in terms of fear of punishment and damaging consequences. Mature levels of reasoning showed understanding of others' thoughts and feelings.

The nature of children's responses indicated that the moral reasoning structure of their concerns was similar across all three fables, within each of the four dimensions investigated. Responses showed that children pass through

a series of conceptually complex moral stages paralleling those described by Piaget. Immature pronouncements of a moral nature were based upon respect for adult authority. Good behavior was constituted through conformity to adult-made rules. Children were disposed to judge guilt on the basis of the material consequences of an act. Before children considered intentions, damage done dominated their decisions.

Higher levels of moral reasoning required the ability to understand what another person might be thinking and feeling. Time and again, children who gave mature responses judged in terms of intentions as opposed to outcomes.

The variety in response within and across grades substantiated response to literature theory in several ways. First of all, the responses underscored Rosenblatt's (1938/1968) Transactional Model insofar as children gave unique re-creations of various facets of the fables and evoked meanings in terms of their individual sensibilities and predilections.

In addition, Iser's (1974) description of the gap-filling process children engage in when makinf personal meaning from a text was accounted for in the wide range of responses to each of the fables within each of the dimensions. The large percent of consistent responses supported Holland's (1975) view that people respond to literature in a characteristically invariant style. Reader response theory and moral judgment theory complemented each other as they illuminated both the uniqueness and the structural similarity of children's response to fables.

Summary of the Findings

In light of the developmental trends, a major finding of this study is that readers' responses to fables reflected a model of the moral domain described by Piaget in The Moral Judgment of the Child. Analysis of the data confirmed developmental trends for each of the four moral dimensions; fewer young children gave mature responses than older children. Kendall's tau demonstrated significant relations between age and maturity of response. The most powerful relation was for the dimension of punishment (tau = .71, $p < .001$). The general developmental trend was further confirmed by data which showed greater percentages of younger students giving responses at the immature level of moral judgment as compared with older students.

Ipsative data for the analysis of consistency revealed that all of the participants were consistent to some extent in their responses. Second-grade participants were most consistent of all in accord with an a priori criterion for consistency; this, however, at an immature level of judgment. In addition, a developmental pattern emerged; high consistency decreased as children matured.

A comparison of grade, level of moral judgment, and content showed that, in general, across the grades from 2 to 6, the number of responses at the immature level decreased and the number at the mature level increased, regardless of content. The one exception was the concern of lying where sixth-grade participants gave more mixed than mature responses. This

study indicates that response is affected by the interaction of developmental factors, dimensions, and content.

It is apparent from responses to fables that this traditional prose form can be used to elicit judgments about the concerns of responsibility and blame, the extent and nature of obligations to others, and the ways to handle wrongdoing. The responses show, however, that fables are a more appropriate match for the appreciation of some age groups more than for others.

Implications for Teaching

The developmental trends revealed in this study suggest that fables could be presented at developmentally appropriate times in the curriculum where they would best be understood in terms of their traditional intent. It is not unreasonable to see literature fulfilling aesthetic purposes at the same time it serves as a propagator of values.

Findings question the appropriateness of using fables with children as young as those in second grade. Unlike fairy tales which are resolved with goodness rewarded and evil punished, fables are open-ended and as such are troublesome for the young child who favors, and is comfortable with, closure and resolution. There is a lack of correspondence between the characteristics of fables and the characteristics of children at the immature level of moral development. The abstractions of wisdom and folly, or good and evil, personified in the short narratives are elusive to young minds which

respond in only the most concrete terms. The flat, stereotypic characters are used symbolically which is often difficult for young children to understand.

It is certain that the youngest children in this study understood the fables primarily in terms of an egocentric reward and punishment orientation, unable to grasp the more subtle and generalizable aspects the older children grasped. It is doubtful that fables, dealing with complexities such as cupidity and pride, teach a moral lesson to young children. The responses of older children, however, showed a better understanding that the personifications in fables illustrated larger human qualities. It would seem that fables were better suited for this age group.

Piaget (1932/1965) believes that theoretic moral reflection constitutes a progressive conscious realization of moral activity and that "discussion gives rise to reflection and objective verification" (p. 403). There are implications here to inform classroom practice, although the relation between what children say and what they do is tenuous. If we can help children to verbalize about moral dilemmas, using fables or other forms of literature, we may be getting a step closer to helping them act upon their pronouncements. When the characteristics of literature match children's thinking, literature may be able to play a facilitating role. At the very least, it will help children to recognize alternatives and to consider different points of view.

Children's responses revealed such versatility in their

perceptions that teachers can no longer insist upon only one correct answer to the questions they pose and need to examine their position about what constitutes an adequate answer to a question. We need to recognize that children respond from culturally diverse experiential bases, to encourage diversity in responses, and to probe for higher levels of reasoning.

Research informs practices designed to cultivate children's responses to literature. The trends described here must be considered if we are to enable children to experience literature in the richest possible way. Finding a good match between a reader and a book is a crucial step in maximizing response. This is related to when and how English teachers expose children to the various genres of literature.

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APPENDIX A

THE STIMULUS QUESTIONS

The following questions for the three fables are coded respectively by (I) for intentionality, (R) for relativism, (P) for punishment, and (IS) for independence of sanctions. Each series is preceded by the general question "Did you understand the story? Let's hear you tell it." This is Piaget's prescription for an indication of comprehension and the investigator's device for screening students for inclusion in the study.

"The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" Stimulus Questions

1. Did you understand the story? Let's hear you tell it.

2. Why did the shepherd boy cry, "Wolf!" at the beginning of the story? What makes you say that? (I)

3. What was he thinking, at the beginning, when he cried, "Wolf!"? Why? (I)

4. Was the boy right or wrong when he cried, "Wolf!" at the beginning? What makes you say that? (R)

5. Why was the boy right (wrong) when he cried, "Wolf!"? (R)

6. How would you punish the shepherd boy, if you would? Why? (P)

7. I know a child who said that the shepherd boy should (shouldn't) be punished. What do you think of that? Why? (P)

8. Why shouldn't he have cried, "Wolf!"? (IS)

9. Why shouldn't he lie? What makes you say that? (IS)

"The Fox and the Goat" Stimulus Questions

1. Did you understand the story? Let's hear you tell it.

2. Why did the fox fool the goat? What makes you say that? (I)

3. What was the fox thinking when he told the goat that the water was so fresh down in the well? How do you know? (I)

4. Was the fox right or wrong to trick the goat to get him in the well? What makes you say that? (R)

5. Why was the fox right (wrong) to trick the goat? (R)

6. How would you punish the fox, if you would? Why? (P)

7. I know a child who said that the fox should (shouldn't) be punished. What do you think of that? Why? (P)

8. Why shouldn't the fox have tricked the goat? (IS)

9. Why shouldn't people fool each other? What makes you say that? (IS)

"The Lion and the Mouse" Stimulus Questions

1. Did you understand the story? Let's hear you tell it.

2. Why did the lion let the frightened mouse go? What makes you say that? (I)

3. What was he thinking when he let the mouse go? Why? (I)

4. Was the lion right or wrong not to eat the mouse? What makes you say that? (R)

5. Why was the lion right (wrong) not to eat the mouse? (R)

6. How would you have punished the lion if he had eaten the mouse, if you would? Why? (P)

7. I know a child who said that if the lion had eaten the mouse, that the lion should (shouldn't) be punished. What do you think of that? Why? (P)

8. Why should the lion have let the mouse go? (IS)

9. Why shouldn't people harm each other? What makes you say that? (IS)